A Day and A Night in Ramadan
The Fast of the Day

Ramadan is a very special month for the Muslims, as in it Muslims around the world perform various types of worship, the most important of them being fasting. This fasting of Ramadan is one of the five pillars of Islam, mandatory upon all adolescents and adults who have the ability. Ramadan is also the month in which the first revelation came to the Prophet Muhammad, and thus is called the "Month of the Quran". During this month, there is a noticeable change in people's lives as well as societies. This article will describe a typical day of a Muslim during this month of forgiveness.

An Early Meal

"Eat a predawn meal, for indeed in it there is blessing." (*Saheeh Al-Bukhari*)

Although not obligatory, Muslims families throughout Ramadan rise early in the morning before the first traces of light and partake in a light meal in implementation of this Prophet teaching. Usually, the day of a Muslim starts with the dawn prayer performed when the first traces of light appear in the sky, but since it is the time when one starts the fast by withholding from food or drink, the Prophet, may the mercy and blessings of God be upon him, encouraged Muslims to arise before that time and partake in a meal.

From this it is clear that the point of fasting is not that one feels hunger throughout the day, but rather that one changes their lifestyle in order for it to be more conducive to the worship of Allah, a fact which will become quite clear. One who often misses the dawn prayer, the hardest of the five prayers to perform due to its stated time, in this blessed month arises early in order to partake in a meal. Thus this person becomes accustomed to awakening at an early hour, ultimately helping him to perform the dawn prayer for the rest of the year.

The most beloved of the voluntary prayers is one called "Qiyaam -ul-Layl", or the Night Prayer[1]. This prayer is performed before the dawn prayer in solitude. It is so beloved that it is usually nicknamed "the Prayer of the Pious", a prayer performed by the devout when the majority of people are still sleeping in their beds. God described this prayer in the Quran, saying:

"Their sides forsake from (their) beds, calling upon their Lord in fear and in hope...." (Quran 32:16)

Waking in the early hours before dawn to eat a meal also encourage the believers to perform this blessed prayer, one which otherwise seem like an arduous task for some.

This predawn meal is to be eaten close to the time of dawn, and thus people continue to eat

until they hear the mu'ezzin, or caller of prayer, call out the azaan from the local mosque, signaling that the first traces of light have appeared. Thus, Muslims end their meal and prepare themselves to attend the congregational prayer at their local mosque, held five times a day throughout the year.

The Month of the Qur'an

After attending the dawn prayer, many Muslims choose to sit in the mosque for a while and recite a selected portion of the Quran at this time. Recitation of the Quran is recommended at all times, and due to it one's faith increases in Islam:

"The believers are only those who, when Allah is mentioned, their hearts tremble with fear, and when His Verses are recited unto them, they (i.e. the Verses) increase their Faith; and they put their trust in their Lord (Alone)." (Quran 8:2)

Being the month in which the Quran was revealed, Muslims are even more zealous to recite its entirety, as this was also done by the Prophet.

"[The Prophet] would meet him (Gabriel) every night in Ramadan and they would recite the Quran to each other." (*Saheeh Al-Bukhari*)

Quite often in Ramadan in the Muslim world, you will hardly find a mosque empty during any part of the day. Muslims try to set aside time this month in order to complete the Quran and ponder its meanings.

Fasting of the Day

In most Muslim countries, workload and schedules are lightened in order to accommodate for the special features of this month. Children go to school at a later time to accommodate for their early rise and the late night prayer, and the majority of businesses close well before dusk. Many stores also remain open throughout the night.

During daylight hours until the sun sets below the horizon. Muslim abstain all types of food and drink, as well as sexual intercourse with their spouses. This creates a sense within the Muslim throughout the day that they are obeying the commands of God, as they leave things which are perfectly permissible at other times. This created within the Muslims a conscience which encourages them to leave those deeds impermissible at all times. Muslims, dry-mouthed from lack of water and abstaining from all types of food seen throughout the day, gain a sixth sense - God consciousness - and this is the goal of fasting the month of Ramadan. God says in the Quran:

"Fasting has been prescribed for you as it has been prescribed for those before you in order that you become of the God-conscious." (Quran 2:183)

Fasting is a secret worship which a person offers to God. He may very well eat and drink in privacy without anyone coming to know of it... but the trait which keeps the Muslim from doing so is this consciousness of His Lord.

For this reason, one sees that many sinful Muslims as well leave many of their sins during this blessed month, due to its sacredness, and one hopes that this will cause them to be more faithful throughout the remainder of the year.

The Prophet warned Muslims against certain sins they might easily fall into and thus ruin the goal of fasting. The Prophet said:

"Whoever does not stop speaking falsehood and acting in accordance with it, God has no need of him giving up his food and drink." (*Saheeh Al-Bukhari*)

He also warned against being provoked into behaving rudely. He encouraged Muslims to respond to one who may provoke him by saying:

"Indeed I am fasting, Indeed I am fasting." (*Saheeh Al-Bukhari*)

These Prophetic sayings are clear in that the main benefit of Ramadan is spiritual and moral rectitude.

Thus one finds in Muslim societies that a spirit of peace dwells in the hearts of Muslims throughout Ramadan, due to the extra worship and avoidance of all evilness and ill manners. One finds that people are generally more easy to deal with and lighthearted, and when one lives in a society for one month in which most of the people are fasting, the sense of unity and brotherhood which results is unmatched by any other occasion, except maybe the Hajj.

Iftar, or Breakfast

As the day ends, Muslims gather in their homes in wait for sunset. Mothers and daughters are usually busy at this time preparing breakfast and dinner, while men usually return from their work and slip into more comfortable clothes, either taking time to recite the Quran or help out in the preparation for breakfast.
Before sunset, the family gathers at the dining table in wait for the mu'ezzin, utilizing this time supplicating to Allah and asking Him for His Mercy.

"Indeed for each fasting person there is a prayer which is answered when they break their fast." (*Tuhfat-ul-Muhtaj*)

Once the call to prayer is heard, Muslims hurry to break their fast with dates, in emulation of the Prophet, and offer words of gratitude taught by the Prophet.

"The Thirst has been quenched, and the veins have become moist and full, and the reward is certain, God willing." (*Abu Dawood*)

Many Muslims add:
"Oh Allah, indeed for You Alone I have fasted, and in You alone I have believed. With your provisions I have broken my fast, and upon You I have trusted."

Muslims then eat a light meal of various appetizers and drinks. Many times, Muslims find themselves either invited or inviting others, whether they be members of the extended family, one's friends, or the poor. The majority of mosques also offer free food in order ease the sufferings for the poor. Many mosques hold *iftar* in order to strengthen community ties, common in countries in which Muslims are minorities. Prophet Muhammad encouraged to feed others during this blessed month in his saying:

"Whoever gives food to a fasting person with which to break his fast, he will have a reward equal to his (the fasting person)..." (*Al-Tirmidhi*)

Special rations are also distributed to needy households in the beginning of the month by charitable organizations to meet the needs of the month.

The delight felt at breaking fast is one truly indescribable. Never does the most meager of meals seem so tasty or bring so much joy to a believer. Indeed the Prophet spoke the truth when he said:

"The fasting person will feel two moments of joy: one moment when he breaks his fast and another when he meets his Lord." (*Saheeh Al-Bukhari*)

There is no time at that point to eat a large meal, as sunset is the time for another prescribed prayer. Muslims prepare to attend the congregational prayer, mostly always at walking distance. After attending the dusk prayer, some Muslims eat dinner, while others delay eating until the night prayer is finished, an event which is one of the main features of the night of Ramadan, another spiritual dimension of this blessed month of mercy and blessings.

After performing the dusk prayer, Muslims return to their homes either to continue with their appetizers or eat dinner. Most people, however, choose not to eat much, as it will hinder them in performing that worship which is the delight of the believer in Ramadan - the *taraweeh* prayer. This prayer is held immediately after the night prayer, which is performed when the last traces of dusk disappear, about an hour and a half after the dusk prayer.

The *Taraweeh* (Night Prayer)

The *taraweeh* is a special prayer performed in congregation. It is quite long, lasting about an hour to an hour and a half. It is performed every night of Ramadan, and in it most of the *Imams*, or prayer leaders, seek to complete the recitation of the entire Quran. In it Muslims pray to their Lord, standing, bowing and prostrating to Him, and gain the opportunity to listen to the Quran in its entirety, listening to its verses in a melodious voice as if they were being revealed then

and there. Mosques with more proficient recitors tend to fill quickly, so worshippers arrive earlier than the stated time to reserve their place. Some mosques have over a thousand worshippers who come from all over the city to attend. Indeed it is an experience one awaits an entire year to experience. The *taraweeh* prayer is a means of forgiveness, as the Prophet said:

"Whoever stands the night in prayer in Ramadan believing in God and seeking His reward, all his previous sins will be forgiven." (*Saheeh Al-Bukhari*)

Worshippers listen to the Quran being recited in prayer and ponder over its meanings, and the voice of the *Imam* has much to do with the effect it has on people. In various mosques, it is not rare to see people crying while listening to its verses, verses which speak of the blessings of God, His Mercy and Love, His Paradise which He has reserved for the patient believers, as well as verses which speak about the sufferings of Hell. The Quran is a revelation which speaks to each individual, and thus each individual feels that God is directly addressing him when he hears it. Thus the feelings which arise while listening to its recitation is truly incomparable and indescribable.

At the end of the *taraweeh* prayer, the Imam and the congregation raise their hand in supplication to God for themselves and for the Muslims, asking God to forgive their sins, give them strength to practice their faith and remain firm, enter them into Paradise, to cure the sick, to forgive those who have already passed away, and all other good things of this world and the next. They also ask God to save them from the punishment of the day of Judgment, to ease their account on that day, and also to ease the sufferings of their brethren throughout the world. It is not uncommon to find the majority of the congregation in tears begging their Lord. Indeed the *taraweeh* prayer is one of the highlights of Ramadan and plays a great role in giving inspiration to and the rectitude of the Muslims.
After the *taraweeh*, Muslims return to their homes and eat dinner, and then retire to bed in preparation for their early rise for the predawn meal.

As one can see, Ramadan is a month in which various kinds of worship are performed to God. Ramadan is like a training period in which Muslims change their lifestyles to one which is in accords to God's commandments. From the time a person awakens in the morning, throughout the day and into the night, a Muslim is performing various types of worship, some obligatory while others voluntary, all in order to gain the pleasure of his Lord. This month is indeed a key factor in the lives of Muslims, a period of rejuvenation in which the believer is inspired for another year in his life, one filled with the pleasure of God and void of His anger.

There are other special features in Ramadan.

The Last Ten Nights

1. "Indeed we have revealed it (the Quran) in the Honored Night.
2. And what will explain to you what the Honored Night is
3. The Honored Night is better than a thousand months.
4. In it, the angels descend as well as the Spirit (Gabriel) by the permission of their Lord, with all

types of decrees.
5. 'Peace' it is until the rising of dawn." (Quran:97:1-5)

It was Ramadan in which the Quran was revealed from the heavens to the Earth. More specifically, it was one of the last ten nights of this blessed month. The Prophet said:

"Seek the Honored Night in the last ten." (*Saheeh Al-Bukhari*)

On that night, worship and good deeds are better than performing them for a thousand months, as mentioned in the verses above. Thus the Prophet would increase his worship by staying awake the whole night in worship.

"When he entered the [last] ten [nights] of Ramadan, the Prophet would 'rollup his sleeves' and give life to the whole night, and waken his family." (*Saheeh Al-Bukhari*)

Muslims in Ramadan seek this Honored Night in order that they may be given an increase in reward. Muslims spend the whole night in worship, from praying the *taraweeh* prayer to reading the Quran, supplicating to God, and praying extra voluntary prayers. During these nights, there is even an extra congregational prayer held in the mosques which lasts for about an hour and a half to two hours up until the time of the predawn meal. Nights are alive with worship, and people for these ten nights expend all efforts in doing so, seeking that they may have spent the Honored Night in the worship of God. The Prophet said: "Whoever stood in prayer in the Honored Night, believing in God and hoping for His reward, all his previous sins will be forgiven." (*Saheeh Al-Bukhari*)

who are saved from the Fire:

"God chooses who will be saved from the Fire (in Ramadan), and that is every night." (*Al-Tirmidhi*)

For this reason in Ramadan, people fast, pray, and seek the Honored Night in orderthat they may be forgiven for their shortcomings and enter Paradise.

Umrah (Lesser Pilgrimage to Makkah)

The Prophet encouraged people to visit the Kaaba and perform the lesser pilgrimage, or *Umrah*. He said:

"Indeed performing Umrah in Ramadan is equal to performing Hajj with me." (*Saheeh Al-Bukhari*)

Thus, millions of people flock to Mecca to perform this lesser pilgrimage, most coming during the last ten days of the month hoping to earn the reward of Hajj and also witnessing the prayers at the Kaaba, an exhilarating experience for the believer. One meets Muslims from all parts of the world, from all cultures and races, and all have congregated in this sacred sanctuary, fasting throughout the day and worshipping throughout the night, all to earn the pleasure of their Creator, their Lord.

A Month of Forgiveness

We mentioned various Prophetic sayings which state that the various types of worship in Ramadan are a means for forgiveness. Fasting, the *taraweeh* prayer, and praying in the Honored Night are all means of forgiveness.

"Whoever fasts the month of Ramadan, believing in God and hoping for His reward, all his previous sins will be forgiven." (*Saheeh Al-Bukhari*)

"Whoever stands the night in prayer in Ramadan believing in God and seeking His reward, all his previous sins will be forgiven." (*Saheeh Al-Bukhari*)

"Whoever stood in prayer in the Honored Night, believing in God and hoping for His reward, all his previous sins will be forgiven." (*Saheeh Al-Bukhari*)

Ramadaan in general is a month of savior from the Fire:
"God chooses who will be saved from the Fire (in Ramadan), and that is every night." (*Al-Tirmidhi*)

A Month of Charity

As mentioned before, people seek to feed others with food for which to break their fast and donate food rations to needy families to suffice them the month of Ramadan. In addition to this, people are more charitable in general during Ramadan, as charity is considered worship for which God will reward them. The companioned the Prophet, Abdulah b. Abbas, said:

"The Prophet was the most generous of people, and he was even more generous in Ramadan." (*Saheeh Al-Bukhari*)

In order to increase in their good deeds, some Muslims choose to offer their Zakaah[1], or obligatory annual charity, in this month as well.

Private Devotion

There is a special type of worship in Islam in which one devotes himself to the mosque for a period of time, whether it be for a day or a week, and spends his time in reciting the Quran and mentioning praises of God, again a training for having a person becoming accustomed to living a life revolved around the worship of God. In secluding oneself from one's daily routine and indulging in the worship of God, he learns to prioritize his life and give less worth to the life of this world. The Prophet, may the mercy and blessings of God be upon him, himself would practice this act of devotion, called *I'tikaaf*, during the last ten days of Ramadan. He would pitch a tent in the mosque and seclude himself in it, busying himself in various types of individual worship.

Muslims around the world take leave from their work or school and try to fulfill this act of worship, but because of its difficulty, as it entails a type of cutting off from daily life, few people do so. None the less, the majority of the congregational mosques do have a few people

who take to this worship.

Conclusion

As one can see, Ramadan is indeed a very special time for Muslims around the world. It is a month of worship in which sinners repent and return to God, and the believer rejuvenate their faith. It is a training period in which one becomes accustomed to leading a life in accordance to the commands of God and seeking His Pleasure. It is a time when one strengthens their relationship with their Creator. It is a time when one trains himself to do extra acts of worship in addition to the obligatory. The month of Ramadan is one which has no match, and the feelings Muslims have in this month are unexplainable. For this reason, the companions of the Prophet would ask God to give them the blessing to experience Ramadan six months before its arrival, and for six months after its departure, they would seek forgiveness from God for their shortcomings in it. We ask God to accept
the Muslims fasting and praying in this blessed month, and to give others the guidance to be able to fast it as Muslims.